

**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE MIDDLE DISTRICT OF TENNESSEE
NORTHEASTERN DIVISION**

UNIVERSAL LIFE CHURCH
MONASTERY STOREHOUSE, a
Washington non-profit corporation; ERIN
PATTERSON, an individual; GABRIEL
BISER, an individual; and JAMES WELCH,
an individual,

Plaintiffs,

v.

WAYNE NABORS, in his official capacity
as County Clerk of Putnam County,
Tennessee; LISA DUKE CROWELL, in her
official capacity as County Clerk of
Rutherford County, Tennessee; WILLIAM
K. KNOWLES, in his official capacity as
County Clerk of Hamilton County,
Tennessee; ELAINE ANDERSON, in her
official capacity as County Clerk of
Williamson County, Tennessee; and
HERBERT H. SLATERY III, in his official
capacity as Attorney General of the State of
Tennessee,

Defendants.

Case No. 2:19-cv-00049

Judge Crenshaw

Magistrate Judge Newbern

**DECLARATION OF GEORGE FREEMAN IN SUPPORT OF PLAINTIFFS' MOTION
FOR TEMPORARY RESTRAINING ORDER TO ENJOIN ENFORCEMENT
OF TENNESSEE STATUTE 36-3-301, AS AMENDED BY TENNESSEE 2019 PUBLIC
CHAPTER 415**

I, George Freeman, declare as follows:

1. I am the Presiding Chaplain and Director of Universal Life Church Monastery Storehouse ("ULC Monastery" or "the Church"), one of the plaintiffs in this lawsuit. I make this declaration based on my personal knowledge and based on my experience as a ULC Monastery church leader.

2. ULC Monastery was registered as a Washington non-profit corporation in 2006 and is headquartered in Seattle.

3. ULC Monastery champions religious freedom and preaches that “[w]e are all children of the same universe.” It embraces, social justice, and spiritual expression of all kinds. The Church was formed to advance religious faith and freedom with two core tenets. First, a person should always strive to do that which is right. Second, all people are naturally endowed with the rights to practice their beliefs, regardless of what those beliefs are, as long as they do not infringe on the rights of others and are within the law.

4. ULC Monastery’s ministry includes support of charitable organizations, advocacy for marriage equality, and other social justice causes. The Church publishes a blog, which includes sermons written by ULC Monastery ministers, and where many commenters participate in discussions involving issues of religion, spirituality, and social justice.

5. ULC Monastery embraces the principle that those who feel so called can become ministers through the Church. ULC Monastery ordains ministers over the internet for free, and it sends credentials to ministers by mail. ULC Monastery expects its ministers to conduct themselves according to the Church’s two core tenets, but ULC Monastery rejects the idea that a church’s members should be made to obey the commands of any central leadership structure and embraces the equality of all individuals. As stated on our webpage titled “What is ordination?”:

[ULC Monastery] opens its door to all and welcomes all who ask for ordination and grants it without questions as to beliefs, grants ordination for life and for free. We make no religious hurdles, no hoops to jump through, no tests of loyalty, no rings to kiss and no fees to pay. Why? The ULC MONASTERY represents freedom and to have freedom you cannot make demands upon individuals. When people make demands upon others, there exists a hierarchy; someone is higher and someone is lower, someone is better and someone is lesser. The ULC MONASTERY does not act in that manner. In the ULC MONASTERY everyone is equal -- the same level of greatness is enjoyed by all.

This page is available at: <https://www.themonastery.org/training/ordination/what-is-ordination>.

6. ULC Monastery uses cyberspace to ordain those who feel called based on its belief regarding what ordination is and is intended to be in the first place. Ordination is the personal calling of an individual, by God, to enter into the ministry. ULC Monastery refuses to impose its own constructs or requirements on persons who feel God has called them into ministry. To do so would conflict with the Church's most fundamental tenets.

7. For those looking to be ordained, ULC Monastery advises on its page "Meaning of Ordination": "Sincerity is the key in ordination If you are ordained, you are expected by society to be different, to be a better person and to have a higher moral center in which others take refuge" ULC Monastery urges its ministers and prospective ministers to actively fulfill the services of a clergy person, warning that those who "feel that being ordained is all they need . . . are wrong – seriously wrong. Being and doing are two different sets of conditions." This page is available at: <https://www.themonastery.org/training/ordination/meaning-of-ordination>.

8. Many ULC Monastery ministers choose to perform marriages, if they feel called to do so. This includes ministers in Tennessee. Through its website, ULC Monastery offers its ministers resources such as training and assistance in how to officiate weddings, deliver sermons, or found a church. ULC Monastery also maintains a private social network online where its ministers can fellowship. ULC Monastery strives to fulfill the spiritual needs of as many different groups as possible by offering a wealth of information, a variety of services, and networking opportunities. The Church views this communion and fellowship of its many scattered ministers as just as valid a form of worship as the weekly services held in some of the

world's more traditional "brick-and-mortar" religious institutions. The Church believes, from a religious perspective, that man could not have a God if that God wasn't part of cyberspace.

9. The Church relies on the internet to communicate with its ministers and intends to continue to ordain minister through an online process. To complete the ordination process, adherents fill out an online form including their full legal name (pseudonyms or nicknames are not allowed), their location, and their contact information. That form can be found here: <https://www.themonastery.org/ordination-form>. The page also links ULC Monastery's Terms and Conditions of Use for those requesting ordination, which are available at <https://www.themonastery.org/terms>. These Terms and Conditions highlight the importance of online communications to the Church, informing ministers that "[f]requently, the Universal Life Church Monastery will invite you to contribute to our site as part of our effort to build and maintain a global faith community by utilizing the collaborative power of the internet." Terms and Conditions of Use, ¶ 3.a.

10. After an applicant submits the ordination request form, the site prompts them to review and verify their information. The prompt reminds applicants that ULC Monastery will not recognize ordinations using false or incomplete information. It also states: "After being ordained, you will be able to order minister supplies, access a full library of training literature, and perform ceremonies like weddings, funerals, and baptisms."

11. Once the applicant submits the final application, the applicant is brought to a page and receives an email showing a copy of the new minister's credentials. The page states: "Welcome, [NAME], to the congregation of the Universal Life Church. As of [DATE], you are now an ordained minister." The page further states:

Before performing any weddings, please click the buttons above to learn more about the ULC, receive weddings training, view a customized guide to performing

marriage in your state, or generate a personalized script for the upcoming ceremony.

Beyond solemnizing legal marriages, your ordination allows you to exercise a host of rights and freedoms made available to all ministers. You can start your own church, create good in your community in your new capacity, as well as perform baptisms, funerals, house-blessings, baby-namings, and a number of other ceremonies.

12. For years, ULC Monastery has received reports from its ministers in Tennessee regarding county clerks who have discriminated against the Church's ministers and deemed their ordinations invalid based on the law's language restricting the right to solemnize marriages to those who were ordained through a "considered, deliberate, and responsible act." ULC Monastery strongly disagrees that its ministers do not take part in a "considered, deliberate, and responsible act" when they choose ordination through the Church. To the contrary, ordination through ULC Monastery signifies a commitment among the minister, the ULC Monastery, and other adherents that the minister upholds ULC Monastery's core tenets.

13. With the passing of Tennessee 2019 Public Chapter 415, dozens of ULC Monastery ministers from across Tennessee have contacted the Church to express their concern regarding the ban on marriages performed by those with "online ordinations." Many ministers have expressed their desire to continue performing marriages in Tennessee.

14. The impending implementation of 2019 Public Chapter 415 has already harmed ULC Monastery. The Church's ministers in Tennessee have lost faith in the validity of their status as ministers. The effect of the new law is to publically deem ULC Monastery an invalid or subordinate religious organization, which impacts the Church's goodwill and reputation. Once the law takes effect, it will immediately prevent ULC Monastery's ministers from conducting one of the most universal and effective forms of outreach: solemnizing marriages. This restriction will dramatically limit the ULC Monastery's ability to spread its message in Tennessee, which harms the Church in incalculable ways. It is not practical for ULC Monastery

to operate physical locations to accommodate all those who wish to be ordained, nor does the Church want to do so, as it would be inconsistent with our model of ministry. The Church relies on cyberspace to reach and commune with these individuals. ULC Monastery rejects the idea of a network of “brick and mortar” locations all controlled by a central leadership. It would limit the Church’s reach and hinder its operation if the Church were forced to use outdated methods such as mail or fax to complete the ordination process.

15. ULC Monastery ordained Erin Patterson as minister of the Church on December 28, 2015.

16. ULC Monastery ordained Gabriel Biser as minister of the Church on January 28, 2015.

17. ULC Monastery ordained James Welch as minister of the Church on January 28, 2018.

I declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the United States that the forgoing is true and correct.

Executed on June 24, 2019, in Seattle, Washington.

DocuSigned by:

George Freeman